Barts Health NHS
NHS Trust

An exploration into the expansion of the role of the health visitor in Safeguarding Children

Janine Ellul
Safeguarding Children Advisor
Barts Health NHS trust.

Background

Completed as part of an Msc dissertation

Safeguarding children is increasingly being recognised as a public health issue

Health visitors are community nurses who are in a unique position to recognise and raise concerns about families.

Scant research exists to support the work of the health visitor in this area

Aim of the research

The primary aim of the study was to explore the lived experience of a group of health visitors in an inner city borough in relation to their safeguarding practice and its expansion in their workload.

Methodology

A phenomenological approach was used. This approach used a semi-structured interview schedule. Ten health visitors working in an inner city borough were individually interviewed. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. The transcripts were subjected to a thematic analysis.

Findings

Findings from the data showed that there were five main themes.

Findings

1)The expansion of the concept of safeguarding.

HV5' When I look back forty years ago, although I did have a child die on my case-load, very early on but that was obviously a child death is exceptional, there was very little safeguarding or if there was any I was not nearly as aware of it as I am now.

Findings

2) The role of the health visitor is complex.

HV10' ***And health visitors who are skilled are actually picking up lots of information that they are not necessarily aware that they are doing that and it's intuition and so it goes back to what is intuition? But it is actually based on experience and observation.***

Findings

3) The importance of supervision.

HV4' ***First and foremost my support comes from my team'.***

HV2' ***I think good supervision and the supervision here is really, really good.‘***

HV3' ***I think you are just getting the cases that perhaps you don't really need to be discuss but other more nebulous cases aren't discussed, I think that we could do with more supervision.'***

Findings

4) Loss of the public health role

HV9' We are not doing public health. That should be our bread and butter.‘

HV4' Our remit is now wider than public health, it's a holistic view.'

HV4' As a health visitor we really have something that the other professionals don't have which is overview, health is often the agency that has seen the family from one point in time to another.'

Findings

5) The blurring of professional boundaries.

HV7' I think that the threshold for children's social care intervention has raised, it has been raised a lot higher. Cases that five years ago I would have expected a social worker to be involved in there is a lot more expectation that other agencies will work together to meet those risks and work with the family'.

Discussion and recommendations

Training and Education. HVs need to have a discussion about their role in safeguarding

Professional and role recognition. Commissioners need to further understand this role and account for it in funding

Enhancing Safe practice thorough supervision

Further Research including •How can we incorporate a public health approach to safeguarding children? • What are skills and expertise that enhance Safeguarding practice? • Why safeguarding work is so complex?

The interactive bit….

For discussion
What are your thoughts and feelings about your role in safeguarding children?

What does success in safeguarding children mean for you?

For your organisation?

For your client?

Thank you for listening and taking part.